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The Chinatown Community Plan marks the first time in the history of the Chinatown neighborhood when community concerns and aspirations guided the City's blueprint for future planning and development affecting Chinatown and the vicinity. The plan and the accompanying Zoning amendments embody the common vision and community spirit that has evolved through this historic grassroots planning effort for Chinatown.

This community-based master plan initiative is part of the City's comprehensive effort to manage growth through city-wide rezoning which was initiated in 1987. On January 25, 1990, the BRA Board voted on recommending to the Zoning Commission the adoption of the zoning text and map amendments proposed for Chinatown. The proposed Chinatown Community Plan which was taken under advertisement by the Board on February 8 is scheduled for the recommendation on March 15. When adopted by the City, the Chinatown Community Plan shall serve as the portion of the general plan for the City of Boston applicable to Chinatown.

NOTE: A final report of the Chinatown Community Plan will be made available on March 15 through the CNC and the BRA.

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CHINATOWN: A COMMUNITY AT A CROSSROADS

For more than 30 years, Chinatown has struggled with highway engineers, institutional builders, and city planners. The Chinatown neighborhood, which more than tripled in population from 1950 to 1987, has lost over half of its land to new roads and medical institutions. Meanwhile, the quality of life in Chinatown has been diminished by the nearby Combat Zone.

The Critical Turning Point

In 1986, the disparate forces of neighborhood growth and institutional expansion collided over a proposal to build a 600-car garage for institutional use on a Chinatown site. The neighborhood's opposition to the garage proposal was supported by the City, which made the needs of the community the basis for land use planning. The City's decision to support the neighborhood in rejecting the garage proposal set the course for a community-based master planning effort to guide future land use in Chinatown.

This critical turning point in the history of Chinatown land use planning and development culminated with the 1988 designation of the Quincy School Community Council as the redeveloper of a city-owned parcel in Chinatown. The designation was challenged in court by the neighboring institutions, but the community and the City prevailed. The court confirmed the City's and the community's position that city planning should respond to changing socio-economic conditions in order to address community needs for affordable housing and services.

COMMUNITY-BASED PLANNING PROCESS

In July of 1987, the Chinatown-South Cove Neighborhood Council (CNC) and the City launched the joint master plan initiative for Chinatown. Throughout the planning process, the CNC was responsible for coordinating community participation with technical assistance from professional consultants, an MIT Urban Design Studio, and an interdisciplinary City planning staff.

POLICY GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The long-term viability and prosperity of Chinatown as a historic residential neighborhood and a cultural, business, and service center will ultimately enrich Boston as a city of neighborhoods that thrives on its diverse heritage. Guided by this common vision, the policy goals and objectives of the comprehensive development plan for Chinatown are:

- To strengthen the family oriented nature of the working class neighborhood by containing the Combat Zone activities and creating affordable housing;

- To broaden Chinatown's economic base by reinforcing community services and providing opportunities for future expansion and diversification of business and employment;

- To enhance Chinatown's cultural heritage and historic legacies embodied in its unique streetscape and community infrasturcture;

- To protect Chinatown's historic land base by redirecting institutional development to the periphery of the district and the preventing highway construction from infringing on the neighborhood; and

- To connect future Chinatown with the Midtown Cultural District, the South End, and the South Station area by building land bridges including the Hinge Block,, the Massachusetts Turnpike Air-rights area, and the Chinatown gateway areas.

The ultimate purpose of a comprehensive development plan for Chinatown is to generate a social, economic, and physical environment that supports and nurtures community growth without undermining the quality of life or destroying the singular identity and legacies of the neighborhood dating from the late 19th century.

ELEMENTS OF THE PLAN

Housing: Preserve and increase quality housing supply with the priority on affordable housing, while at the same time stabilizing the residential neighborhood through home ownership and the development of a mixed-income community with a broad-based leadership.

Community Services: Enable community members and residents to be self-sufficient and work towards the continued development of the immigrant community through quality service programs and facilities.

Business and Economic Development: Strengthen and revitalize existing economic base of local businesses and commercial activity, while at the same time facilitate diversification in business and employment.

Land Use: Preserve and expand Chinatown's land base for the continued development of the neighborhood as a center of

housing, business, service, and cultural activities for the Asian community.

Urban Design and Development Control: Ensure the rich diversity and vitality of Chinatown and reinforce its image and environmental quality. Specific urban design guidelines are developed for the critical sites and locations in Chinatown.

Historic Preservation: Preserve Chinatown's unique architectural legacies while allowing for the continued improvement of the built environment that is compatible with its historic character.

Open Space: Create a variety of open spaces and an improved public realm to serve the divergent social and recreational needs of Chinatown's residents, workers, shopper, and visitors.

Traffic and Transportation: Maximize transportation access to and from Chinatown while upgrading its pedestrian environment and improving vehicular circulation and parking for the neighborhood residents and other users.

ACHIEVING THE PLAN

The Chinatown Community Plan shapes the course of future actions by establishing common goals and objectives, developing specific guidelines, identifying viable options and resources, and setting the plan in motion with the immediate implementation of key public initiatives. These public initiatives include permanent zoning amendments, Chinatown Housing Improvement Program, Chinatown Transportation Improvement Program, and the Chinatown Beautification Program, Capital Improvement Programs, and others. Achieving the long-term success of the Chinatown Community Plan will have to draw from the collective commitment, initiative, and ingenuity of the community, public sectors, and private entities. Continued efforts in community empowerment, education, capacity building, and proactive participation are essential. With the community eventually owning over half of the land area in Chinatown as a result of implementing the Chinatown Housing Improvement Program, the future of Chinatown will be affected not only by public policies and private actions but also by the choices made by the Chinatown community.

CHINATOWN DISTRICT ZONING AMENDMENTS

Business and Economic Development: Neighborhood businesses are encouraged to expand into the old Combat Zone area and the

Hinge Block, and major new and large scale commercial and mixed-use development is under consideration for the Gateway site, providing jobs and economic expansion and growth. Specifically, the zoning plan provides density incentive for the development of community services for long-term use; neighborhood business opportunities in large commercial development; and expansion opportunities for existing business in the commercial core of Chinatown.

Land Use and Urban Design: To protect the existing commercial and residential mixed-use environment of Chinatown, a number of uses have been selected for regulation by floors. Chinatown is a neighborhood in which uses vary by floor. Vertical zoning allows for commercial establishments on the lower levels, while protecting the residences above. Furthermore, certain uses are also regulated by gross floor area to provide for large-scale establishments on the upper floors while maintaining the rich variety resulted from the many modestly-scaled businesses located on the street level. Uses that are regulated by floor and by size include community retail uses, community uses, cultural uses, educational uses, general retail uses, office uses, service uses, take-out, and trade shop. Restaurant uses are regulated by floor area only.

Appropriate design guidelines are proposed for building set-back to enhance the continuity of streetscape. To help avoid blank walls and reinforce street-level activities and vitality of the pedestrian environment in the Beach Street and Harrison Avenue commercial core of Chinatown, a minimum 60 percent transparency guideline is proposed for the street wall of a ground floor establishment with more than 5000 square feet of gross floor area.

Open Space Districts: To protect and expand public parks, recreation areas, and green spaces in Chinatown, four permanent open space zones are proposed: the Gateway Park and the Gateway Park Expansion Area in the Commercial Chinatown area, the Tai-Tung Park (116 Tyler Street) in the Residential Chinatown area, and the Pagoda Park in the Chinatown Gateway area. Creative provisions for open space will be required with each new housing development. Additional open space areas may be designated as a result of the comprehensive planning study for the Chinatown Gateway and Turnpike Air-Rights Special Study Areas.

As-Of-Right Height and Density Regulations: A proposed project within Chinatown, with the exception of the protection areas, special study areas, and planned development areas, is allowed an as-of-right building height of 80 feet (6 stories) and FAR 6 (gross floor area about 6 times the building site). With design review, building height can increase to 100 feet (8 stories) and building density to FAR 7, except in the

Institutional Subdistrict where building height can increase to 125 feet (about 9 stories with higher floor-to-floor clearance required for medical facilities) and density to FAR 8. These regulations will protect the existing scale and historic character of the residential, commercial, and institutional areas in Chinatown, while providing room for further growth and expansion.

Protection Areas: The historic and cultural legacies of Chinatown's buildings and streets will be preserved while allowing for incremental changes through the creation of three Protection Areas. These include Liberty Tree National Register District, the Beach/Knapp Street National Register District, and the Historic Chinatown area. The Historic Chinatown area has essentially retained the tight-knit urban scale that reflects the neighborhood's origin dated from the 19th century. Most of the area has been developed on 20' x 70' lots originally divided for row houses. The streets are mostly between 25' to 40' wide, including sidewalks. More than 90 percent of the existing buildings are 65' high or less, and all under 80'.

Building heights will follow the historical precedent of 65 feet (5 stories) while building densities will be limited to FAR 6. With design review, building height and densities can reach 80' (about 6 stories) and FAR 7. Within these areas building design must be sympathetic to the historic fabric of the area.

Planned Development Area: To allow growth that will benefit the Chinatown community, the new zoning designates Planned Development Areas (PDA) in the Residential Chinatown area, the Turnpike Air-Rights, and the Chinatown Gateway areas. A PDA is an area where a more flexible zoning law is established to encourage desirable, large-scale growth on under-utilized sites. The purpose of establishing PDAs are: to encourage the creation of affordable housing, open space, and cultural facilities; to create community facilities and provide community services; to furnish day care facilities; to provide for neighborhood economic development and commercial expansion which is compatible with adjacent uses, and to provide connections between Chinatown and adjacent areas.

Each proposed project must adhere to a development plan which is approved only after public hearings by the BRA and the Zoning Commission. Upon approval, a project within a PDA can increase its building height and density to 175' and FAR 6 in PDA I, Residential Chinatown; 250' and FAR 6 in PDA II, Turnpike Air-Rights; or 300' and FAR 10 in PDA III, Chinatown Gateway/South Bay Interchange. Both PDAs in the Turnpike Air-Rights area and the Chinatown Gateway area are also designated as Special Study Areas to allow for continued planning

analysis and refinements before permanent zoning regulations are recommended.

Special Study Areas: Comprehensive planning studies will be conducted for three Special Study Areas in Chinatown: the Tyler Street Special Study Area, the Massachusetts Turnpike Special Study Area, and the Chinatown Gateway Special Study Area. All three areas face major changes as a result of the transportation construction projects which are still evolving including: the reconstruction of the Central Artery effecting Hudson Street and Kneeland Street; the Orange Line Replacement Service impacting the Massachusetts Turnpike Air-Rights area; and the new ramps off Marginal Road and Herald Street proposed by the city to relieve neighborhood streets from regional traffic generated by the reconstructed Central Artery. In addition, all three areas offer the possibility of accommodating redirected and controlled institutional expansion away from the Chinatown core, while contributing to the quality of life for the nearby residential neighborhoods.

Permanent zoning regulations for the Special Study Areas will be proposed at the end of the studies. The planning goals and objectives for these areas are:

- Tyler Street Special Study Area: balance and integrate institutional development, housing, community services, and businesses.

- Chinatown Gateway Special Study Area: balance the different needs for housing resources, economic diversification, entrepreneurial development, open space, and possibly institutional growth.

- Turnpike Air-Rights Special Study Area: extend the existing residential areas and create community services and open space to benefit the abutting communities, including Chinatown, South End, and Bay Village.

Institutional Master Plan: The new zoning requires institutions in the area to submit master plans for their proposed development projects. The Institutional Master Plan will be approved by the city only if it is consistent with the Chinatown Community Plan. Neighborhood groups will be provided with 60 days to review a proposed institutional master plan prior to any City approvals.

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